

Aging Gracefully during the Pandemic

Session 5: Hope

Opening Prayer

Pray the following words aloud together:

Dear Lord,
Help us to see thee more clearly,
Love thee more dearly,
Follow thee more nearly,
day by day.

We pray this in Jesus' name.
Amen.

Keeping Hope Alive

Read the talking points throughout this process aloud. Simply have each participant read one paragraph at a time to the whole group, continuing around the circle.

- “I hope to see you soon.”
“I hope this virus disappears soon so we can all be together again.”
“I hope small businesses can open soon. People are getting desperate.”
- Day after day, we express our hopes in this time of grief, loss, and foreboding. It seemed easier to be hopeful just a short time ago. This kind of change was beyond our imaginings just a few months ago.
- Previously, we had a routine which might have changed from day to day and week to week, with volunteer activities, recreational outings, visitors, or trips. Now the days appear mostly the same. Our contacts are severely limited. If we walk outside, everyone must stay a safe distance. Most people smile or wave, but conversations are brief and often about the same topic: the coronavirus and all its ramifications. So how can we hope?
- Hope is identified as a virtue because it takes practice, discipline, and courage. Hope must be cultivated and nourished. It carries dynamism and depth. It is connected to faith and charity. Hoping the sun will shine for a picnic is whimsy. Hope in a future of peace and abundance, health and harmony, requires effort, contribution, sacrifice, and diligence. Hope calls out to God for insight, bravery, and constancy.
- Archbishop Tutu, who suffered through years of apartheid in South Africa, distinguishes hope from optimism. He says that optimism is superficial and might turn to pessimism if the circumstances change. Hope must be dogged and inextinguishable, “not based on the ephemerality of feelings but on the firm ground of conviction.” How appropriate his words are now as the virus spreads its tentacles into all nations: “To choose hope is to step firmly forward into the howling wind, baring one’s chest to the elements, knowing that, in time, the storm will pass.”
- Paul proclaimed to the Romans: “If God is for us, who is against us?” (Rom. 8:31). This is the time to seal that statement into our hearts. Hope

is about desire and expectation. It is a strong counter to the habit of worry that saps our energy and depletes our spirits. Just singing the popular song “Don’t Worry, Be Happy” will not do it for

us. It is normal to worry, but we are being called to rise above fretting and predicting the worst to trust that regardless of what happens, God is with us along the way.

Reflection Questions

① How do you define hope? How is it different from optimism for you?

② Who do you know that is a hopeful person? What can you learn from him or her?

Building Hope

- Maya Angelou claimed that “hope and fear cannot occupy the same space.” We must choose and mark our path with daily effort. We can practice trekking out of darkness toward light. To do this, we may need to limit our exposure to all the bad news in the headlines. Yes, as responsible citizens we should stay informed about what is happening in the world, but exposing ourselves to an overwhelming amount of bad news day after day after day can leave us feeling battered and bruised and more fearful than ever. Consider setting aside a certain time of day to check the news, and then go about living your life the rest of the time.
- We’ve noticed that some people now have candles lit in their windows. Some homes have a single candle while others display one in every window in the house. Candles remind us of prayer and of rituals for celebration and sadness. This pandemic can feel like a dark tunnel in which we live with questions about when this quarantine will ever be over. Yet we are called to inch our way toward the light and to point the way for others who may be despairing of a new day dawning.
- Hope erodes when we fail to notice beauty and opportunity. Gratitude is a corollary to hope. Our spirits lift when we notice birds and squirrels, new life in spring, or the kindness of a caregiver. A gratitude practice of noting three things each day which we are grateful for can help. St. Ignatius taught a prayer practice called the Examen in which he encouraged us to take some time every day to look back on our day for graces which came to us. Doing this regularly can lead to an expanded awareness of more blessings in our lives.
- A heart filled with gratitude and hope will be steadied and strengthened, alive to goodness and beauty.
- Let us also reflect on Paul’s words to the Christians in Rome who were suffering great persecution. “We also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us” (Rom. 5:3-5).
- Hope-building in our time is an essential element for this journey when light is hard to see amidst daily news reports. We are being asked to endure a difficult time *and* in this time we have the opportunity to build character and strengthen hope. Anyone with whom we live or interact from day to day could use our encouragement and positive attitude to lift their spirits and help maintain equilibrium.
- How can we contribute to the building up of hope? Inquire how the mail carrier or delivery person are doing—they have stressful jobs amidst a contagious virus. Make a special effort to engage neighborhood children who are out playing—from a safe distance.
- Be a collector of good stories or messages you hear or read. Despite all the bad news, there are

many selfless and courageous people doing great things. From people on the front lines in the medical world to four teenagers who picked 300 pounds of a neighbor's oranges to donate to the local food bank, this pandemic is bringing out the best in some people. Make a point to talk about and share these stories, even more than you share the bad news.

- Counteract the media's tendency to report the doom and gloom by listening to Ted Talks, Oprah's Super Soul Sunday, or other inspiring talks, podcasts, or programs for hope-filled messages.
- Remember that it's normal for us to swing between different emotions from day to day, hour to hour, or seemingly even minute to minute during this unprecedented time. Let's practice being

compassionate with ourselves when we are feeling fearful or can't summon hopefulness.

- We can all take turns holding hope for each other. When you have a wellspring of hope, reach out to others who might be struggling more. When you are feeling less hopeful, you can call, email, or text a friend or family member so that you don't feel alone in your hopelessness. In general, others want to help, but they might not know we need help if we don't ask for it.
- Finally, pray for an increase in the virtue of hope and trust that a new day will dawn. Remember that on the Friday and Saturday after Jesus' crucifixion, his friends and relatives were in deep grief. They couldn't imagine the resurrection would happen. We know that it did, and that God continues to bring new life out of death.

Reflection Questions

- ① What are you grateful for during this time of the pandemic?
- ② What are some of the hopeful, good news stories you've read or heard about recently?

- ③ What can you do to counteract the doom and gloom of the media during this pandemic?

Closing Prayer

Pray the following words aloud together:

God of constancy and creativity,
help us to rest in your presence,
confident that you are ever at our side,
guiding, encouraging, and strengthening us.

Teach us to become beacons of hope
to those who are faltering and anxious.

When we are fearful, remind us that
because of Christ's resurrection
new life always follows death.

Let us sing out with assurance:
**CHRIST BE OUR LIGHT,
SHINE IN OUR DARKNESS! Amen**

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